

THE YOUNG DESERTER.

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In the beginning of the war, a youth (whom we will call Charles R—) joined the Confederate army. He seemed fired with hearty zeal for the defence of our assailed rights. His parents were of Northern birth, but of Southern residence, and professed decided adhesion to Southern views.— The first few movements of the war, however, brought their place of abode within the enemy's lines. Their son's company was stationed to guard an important point, where, across the waters of Hampton Roads, the United States flag was full in view, beneath which his father and family had taken refuge. Every day, as he gazed over the wavy expanse, he could see where they dwelt, now reconciled a parently to the Yankee yoke, even if they had not become its aiders and abettors. What influences prevailed over his boyish mind, cannot be certainly known.— But somehow, the longing to join them, or the dislike of camp restraints, or the fickleness of a boy, triumphed over his oath of enlistment, his conviction of the righteousness of our cause, and his dread of the perils of desertion.

The opportunity was not long wanting, which ripened his scarcely formed desire into action.— Numerous light boats were drawn up along the

beach, with which the men were accustomed to sport, sometimes fishing, sometimes barely amusing themselves with a brief excursion. One evening as the gold of sunset was mingling with the silver that crested the waves, Charles R— entered a boat and pushed off. He floated about carelessly with the ebb tide, as it seemed, for a while, by degrees getting further and further out, till, from the distance and the darkening twilight, he might safely venture more decided movements. Perhaps even then he paused, debating whether to go or return; but the attractions ahead were too strong. Behind him were his sworn comrades in arms. Before him loomed the enemy's castle, with the associates of his early life. To them his heart cleaved. The doubt was over. With all the speed his eager and practised hand could give, he urged his boat to Fortress Monroe. He was a successful deserter.

I have known some to enlist under the banner of Jesus, who seemed all animated with noble zeal, whose promptitude and ardor outran the diffidence of slower minds, and gave promise of abundant and extensive usefulness. They "seemed to run well," and received a confidence and position in the church, which gave them power afterwards to bring reproach on the cause. They were not, perhaps, deceivers at first. They meant well, felt earnest, thought themselves sincere; but there was no steadfastness, no principle, no actual renewal about them. Their true

attachments were elsewhere. Their chosen as sociations, their strongest ties, their deepest feelings bound them to the enemy. And so, after a struggle with the shame of fickleness, and with the dread of their sou's peril, and with the obligation of their vows and covenants—they departed. It was not all at once, perhaps; not by vigorous and determined movements at first.— But they went. They left the Lord, they left his people, they left his ordinances, they left his ways, they cast his book aside, they put his laws behind their back, they cut themselves off from Him and His. In the outset, perhaps, it was apparently a simple yielding to the stress of an ebbing tide, to the breathing of an off-shore wind; it was but an imperceptible movement, unsuspected by others, possibly not fully determined on by themselves; but the tendency was away from God and goodness, it was prevailingly toward evil. The temptation grew stronger as the distance and the darkness of the soul increased, and at last they struck out straight to join the enemy.

Are these any such deserters in this camp?— Are there any, who are likely to become such?— Are there any, who are even now conscious of the temptation, which is seducing them from God? Are there any who have begun that ha sportive, half serious parleying which may soo subject them altogether to its snares? Are the any, who are even now swaying back and for on the deceitful waves that lie between the

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gions of purity and evil, half questioning with themselves whether to return or stay?

You have not gone far. Therefore it is easy to stop now. You are not yet determined to yield and go. Therefore determine at once not to go. Your danger may seem slight. It is for that very reason more likely to delude and to destroy you. Your error from the path of duty may appear plausible, may almost seem extenuated, or excused by the circumstances around you. Therefore take the more heed lest you fall. Oh stop! Think where you are going? Pray for grace to Him that is able to keep you from falling.

But perhaps there are some who have passed beyond this doubtful stage of indecision. You are not resisting temptation, not struggling against backsliding; you are not merely meditating a desertion, and hesitating before you begin. You have passed the Rubicon. You have made your choice. You are free from the restraint of religious profession, and have cast the fear of God behind you. Well, you are a successful deserter. You have gone forth from God's people, because you were not of them. And what now?

The vows of God are upon you. You have broken them; but the shattered links still cling around your soul, and cannot be shaken off.—You have renounced his service. But that does not alter the fact, that you once voluntarily enlisted in it. And so you stand, before God and angels and men, as a breaker of your promise, as

a conscious violater of a solemn deliberate covenant with your God. Is it not so?

Your influence is most decidedly felt against the cause of Christ, which once you professed to honor. You are not only ranked with the enemy; but you are so ranked by your own deliberate preference. And you have power to do more to religion, than those who never professed to be Christians. Your conduct seems to say to the world—that you have tried religion, and found it to be a delusion. You may say, this is not your meaning; but such, alas, is the interpretation, which those who do not love God will put on your testimony. They will delight to point to you and say, ‘There is a man who was ‘one of the saints,’ but has grown wiser.” They will boast of your impiety, will strengthen themselves on your weak compliances, will glory in your shame. They will take a fiendish satisfaction in dragging you with them to deeper and more damning degradation, because you once tasted of the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come. Your vices will be the theme of peculiar merriment, because you once sat at the table of the Lord, because your hands have handled the holy sacrament. Your blasphemies will be greeted with special glee, because your lips have joined in the songs of heavenly praise. And your case will be urged as the convincing argument which should deter the giddy from serious thought, the thoughtful from conviction, the convinced from faith in Christ,

the trembling believer from public profession.— You will be made the stumbling block, for the blind to stumble over into hell!

Your case is one of fearful danger, as well as of aggravated sin. “If he that despised Moses’ law died without mercy, of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?” There is in your case peculiar, tremendous danger lest you will lose your soul—lest the same influences which have drawn you aside, should keep you away from God—lest your previous profession of piety may itself become one of the most serious barriers to your becoming willing even to listen attentively to God’s word—lest your former experience may hinder you forever from striving to enter in at the strait gate—may shut you up without effort here, without hope hereafter.

Your case is only not desperate. There is salvation even for such as you, with Him who “is able to save unto the uttermost.” There is pardon for Deserters, who repent and return. Listen! “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” It is said that this word scarlet means double dyed. Come, then, ye double dyed transgressors, who, have

broken both God's law, and your own promise—come and try how freely, fully, Jesus can forgive. "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin."

TOO LATE.

An impenitent sinner was recently brought in to the near prospect of eternity, and the terrors of God's wrath fell upon him. His friends sent for a minister to come and counsel and pray with him; but though he sought earnestly to lead him to Jesus, it seemed of no avail. Every exhortation was met by the mournful plaint, "It is too late—too late!" The minister spoke of the mercy of God, of his long suffering under provocation, and of his gracious assurance that he has "no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that he turn from his way and live." A bitter groan was the first response; and then, as a look of agony convulsed his features, he deliberately said:

"My case is beyond all this. There was a time when God's mercy might have reached me. In after life I often felt the need of religion, but I could not bear to give up the pleasure of sin, and I quieted my conscience by resolving to spend only a few years in sinful indulgences; then I thought I would marry, and promised myself that when once settled down in life, I would without delay give my heart to God.

"At twenty-four I married, and then again conscience reminded me of my vow, and claimed its immediate fulfilment. But I was too deeply intoxicated with the cup of earthly joys to listen to the faithful monitor, and I said, 'Go thy way for this time also.'"

"Then affliction came, and I was brought to the very borders of the grave. In bitter agony I sought the mercy-seat; and again I promised that, if spared, I would at once repent and lead a new life. God's mercy spared me; but with returning health came renewed cares about my business and family, and the great business of life was again put off for a more convenient season. That season never came; serious thoughts and solemn resolutions have often visited me; God's messages of wrath and of mercy have been sounded in my ears, my broken vows have clamored loudly of my guilt, and again and again I have promised myself that *to-morrow* I would repent. Thus have I passed forty years of the most aggravated folly and guilt—God's mercies and judgments alike unregarded; and can you wonder that he now forsakes the wretch he has so long and so patiently borne with? He is just. My destruction is the work of my own hands, and I must reap the bitter fruit to all eternity. *Lost, lost, lost!* must *for ever* be my wail."

And thus he died, another fearful example of the danger of delay, and the vital importance of living in preparation to meet God. " ~~And~~